

**DECISION MEMO**  
**2020 MENA ODEN FARM BILL**  
**U.S. FOREST SERVICE**  
**MENA-ODEN RANGER DISTRICT**  
**MONTGOMERY, YELL, AND SCOTT COUNTY, ARKANSAS**

**BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this project is to promote resiliency of approximately 1029 forested acres to insect and disease infestations through the implementation of thinning treatments. Treatment areas are spread across the Mena-Oden Ranger District and include plantations and natural stands of pine and hardwood forests.

Ideally and according to our Forest Plan, shortleaf pine stands should average no more than between 60 and 75 square feet per acre in pine basal area (p. 84 of Forest Plan) in order to maintain stand health and reduce the risk of insects and diseases due to overcrowding and competition for resources. At present, these stands exceed the recommended basal area, and there is a strong need to reduce their basal areas in an effort to maintain forest health.

Thinning hardwood species also increases their health and vigor. Hardwood and soft mast species will be released where applicable during thinning operations. Post-harvest stocking levels of hardwood species would be maintained at an approximate rate of 10 to 30 percent in pine-dominated stands and approximately 30 to 50 percent in mixed pine and hardwood stands in accordance with Forest Wide Design Criteria FI005 and TH001(Revised Forest Plan).



Figure1: Existing Condition



Figure 2: Desired Condition



## DECISION

In accordance with the 2014 Farm Bill Section 602 amendment to the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, I have decided to commercially thin the areas detailed in Table 1. Design criteria will include maximizing the retention of old growth trees, retaining a diverse hardwood component, and minimizing road construction.

**TABLE 1: 2020 FARM BILL THINNING STANDS**

Compartment #	Stand #	Stand Acres
1118	1	35
1060	28	70
1060	13	129
1061	6	67
1061	13	75
1062	1	106
1062	15	84
1063	1	82
1063	3	126
1059	11	84
1055	31	58
820	9	114
<b>Total Acres</b>		<b>1029</b>

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as Insect and Disease Infestation (Section 603 of HFRA (16 U.S.C.6591b)). This category of action(s) is applicable because the project:

- Is within an insect and disease treatment area designated by the Secretary under HFRA, Section 602;
- Is within areas in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) or Condition Classes 2 or 3 in Fire Regime Groups I,II, or III, outside the WUI;
- Is not within a component of the National Wilderness Preservation System; any Federal land on which, by Act of Congress or Presidential proclamation, the removal of vegetation is restricted or prohibited; a congressionally designated wilderness study area; or an area in which activities would be inconsistent with the Ouachita National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Forest Plan);
- Maximizes the retention of old-growth and large trees, as appropriate for the forest type, to the extent that the trees promote stands that are resilient to insects and disease; considers best available scientific information to maintain or restore the ecological integrity, including maintaining or restoring structure, function, composition, and connectivity; and is developed and implemented through a collaborative process that includes multiple interested persons representing diverse interests; and is transparent and nonexclusive;

- Does not exceed 3,000 acres;
- Will not establish permanent roads;
- Is consistent with the Revised Forest Plan; and
- Was scoped to the public and public notice was provided.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species – the actions will have “no effect” on Federally listed species Arkansas fatmucket, Spectaclecase, Rabbitsfoot mussel and Harperella ; Forest Service sensitive species: actions may impact individuals, but not likely to cause a trend to federal listing or loss of viability: Mena Crayfish, actions may have beneficial impact on Monarch butterfly. (Biological Evaluation, project file). The project “may affect, likely to adversely affect” the Northern Long-eared bat; however, there are no effects beyond those previously disclosed in the programmatic biological opinion dated July 24, 2015. (Project specific Biological evaluation and review was completed September 10, 2019). Concurrence was received October 23, 2019.
- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – there are no floodplains or jurisdictional wetlands within the project area and none will be impacted by project activities; there are no municipal watersheds in the project area
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – none are present within the project area; none will be affected.
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – none are present within the project area; none will be affected.
- Research natural areas – none are present within the project area; none will be affected.
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – There would be no extraordinary circumstances related to these resources because they are not present in the project area. This is based on site specific cultural resource surveys conducted on the analysis area, preparation of a Cultural Resources Report, and consultation on the proposed project with the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer.

Archaeological sites or historic properties or areas – The actions will avoid any sites listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historic resources. This is based on site specific cultural resource surveys conducted on the analysis area, preparation of a Cultural Resources Report, and consultation on the proposed project with the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). On August 26, 2019 consultation correspondences were sent and concurrence was received.



## COLLABORATION AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Collaborative meetings were conducted informing partnering agencies on the implementation of the HFRA insect and disease categorical exclusion beginning in the summer of 2014:

**July 2, 2014 – CFLRP Partners Meeting at Waldron, AR:** Attendees included the University of Arkansas at Monticello (UAM), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF), Native Expeditions, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Arkansas Forestry Commission (AFC), Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC), the Southern Research Station (SRS), National Park Service (NPS), Lower Mississippi Joint Venture (LMJV), Hot Springs High School EAST Lab, Ozark – St. Francis, Ouachita National Forest, and others.

**December 2, 2014 – Oak Team Meeting at AGFC in Russellville:** Attendees included AGFC, AFC, USFS, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC)

**March 11, 2014 – Good Neighbor Authority Meeting at Supervisor's Office in Russellville:** Attendees included the USFS, AGFC, NWTF, and AFC.

**May 18, 2014 – Collaboration Meeting with focus on Farm Bill HFRA Insect and Disease Designations and use of CE, in the Supervisor's Office in Hot Springs and by conference call:** Attendees included AFC, AGFC, TNC, Shortleaf Pine Initiative, LMJV, NWTF, NRCS, and Central Hardwoods Joint Venture.

**June 4, 2015 – Open House at the Mena-Oden Ranger District Office in Mena, Arkansas:** This advertised meeting had four participants. Participants included the Polk County Judge and three Polk County residents.

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Ouachita National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. Project announcement letters were mailed to interested parties on August 13, 2019.

No comments were received.

## FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the Ouachita National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act.

## ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (OBJECTION) OPPORTUNITIES

Decisions that are categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are not subject to an administrative review process (pre-decisional objection process) (Agriculture Act of 2014, Subtitle A, Sec. 8006).

## IMPLEMENTATION DATE

The project may be implemented immediately.



## CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Jade Ryles, Natural Resources Manager, Mena-Oden Ranger District, 1603 Hwy 71North, Mena AR, 71953, 479-394-2382.

TIM OOSTERHOUS  
District Ranger

Date

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